

VZCZCXRO9061
OO RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHLH RUEHNEH RUEHPW
DE RUEHKA #0742/01 2100951
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 290951Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9233
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 8590
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000742

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/INSB AND SCA/FO
USAID/W FOR MELLIS AND RHOWELL ANE/SAA
BANGKOK FOR USAID/OFDA WBERGER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [BG](#) [CASC](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: LIFE IN DHAKA COMES TO STANDSTILL AFTER RECORD
RAINS

SUMMARY
=====

¶1. (SBU) Record rainfall overnight July 28 left major sections of Dhaka temporarily underwater, bringing normal life in the capital to a standstill and causing significant localized damage. The Prime Minister immediately convened an emergency meeting of Dhaka city and ministry officials and criticized them for failing to adequately maintain the capital's drainage system. The diplomatic enclave was not spared the effects of the storm, with several embassy residences suffering water damage. We do not have any reports of injuries to American citizens. The GOB and donors do not plan to provide assistance to those affected by the rains, but this episode has highlighted the need to prepare for future storms and potential flooding in Dhaka.

Record Rains Affect Life in Dhaka City
=====

¶2. (U) Dhaka city and surrounding areas received record precipitation the evening of July 27 - 28 with Bangladesh's Met Office reporting rainfall of 333 mm (13 inches) in a 24 hour period--close to the average for the entire month. Nearly 300 mm (11 inches) fell in just a six-hour period. As a result, residents of Dhaka awoke the morning of July 28 to flooded streets, houses, and underground structures. Many residents were stranded as transportation ground to a halt. Trading at the Dhaka Stock Exchange was delayed for an hour as the building housing the bourse was also flooded. Likewise, government offices were slow to open as the main Secretariat area was inundated with several feet of water and office workers were unable to reach the location. The worst hit areas were in old Dhaka and in the city's business district. The media has reported 10 deaths, mainly caused by electrocution, resulting from the storm. Many businesses also suffered damage, with numerous small shopkeepers seeing their stores wiped out.

Government Responds
=====

¶3. (SBU) Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was quick to respond to the storm, convening an emergency meeting that included the State Minister for Local Government, officials from the Water and Sewer Department, and the Dhaka City Corporation mayor. Hasina stressed the importance of clearing the city's drainage system and accused officials of negligence. Many observers noted the impact of clogged and filled in drainage canals. In a meeting July 29, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Hasan Mahmud said the storm had highlighted the need to prepare for future flooding. He observed that Dhaka's growth had occurred in an environmentally

unsustainable manner, leaving the city vulnerable to such disasters. At the same time, Hasan said the GOB had no plans to provide assistance to those affected by the storm. The GOB would look at longer term responses, such as clearing drains and expanding the holding capacity of lakes and canals in the capital area.

Impact on Embassy Operations
=====

¶4. (U) While spared the worst effects of the storm, the diplomatic enclave also suffered damage from the record rainfall. Lakes on the border of the zone overflowed, inundating neighboring properties and causing localized flooding. Water entered 13 Embassy residences, causing minimal damage but no injuries. One residence was rendered uninhabitable by flood water, and a bamboo scaffolding from a neighboring building also fell and damaged the unit's water tank. While high water near the Embassy was receding by morning and roads were open in the immediate vicinity, several Locally Engaged Staff were unable to report to work because of flooding in their neighborhoods or blocked access routes. Embassy hours were not affected.

Comment
=====

¶5. (SBU) As we have seen in coastal regions following recent storms, over the years Bangladesh's high population density leaves it vulnerable to natural disasters. Dhaka's rapid urbanization and inadequate infrastructure have left residents of the capital city particularly vulnerable. With

DHAKA 00000742 002 OF 002

the rain waters subsiding, those who suffered losses will face the grim task of recovering without assistance from the government or donors. In the meantime, all are watching the weather forecasts and hoping that the heavy rains do not return.

MORIARTY